

New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection

SCHOOL RADON TESTING PROGRAM

Radon in Schools: Fact Sheet for Parents

WHAT IS RADON?

Radon is a naturally occurring radioactive gas that is odorless, colorless and tasteless. It comes from the natural decay of uranium that is found in nearly all soils in the United States. Radon gas is in the air, both inside and outside. When people are outside, the radon levels are so low that they pose no health threat. Unfortunately, radon gas inside homes and schools can build up to levels that become unhealthy.

WHY IS RADON A PROBLEM?

National studies have found that exposure to radon is linked to lung cancer. Radon is the second leading cause of lung cancer, after cigarette smoking. There is no scientific evidence that children are at a higher risk from radon than adults. The risk estimates are based on exposure over a lifetime, and most lung cancer cases occur after age 60. Radon does not appear to be linked to any other diseases, such as asthma.

When considering the risk to children, keep in mind that children spend 12 percent of their time in school and more than 75 percent of their time at home, during the year. It is important to test schools for radon; it is even more important to test your home and mitigate if there are high levels of radon.

WHY IS MY CHILD'S SCHOOL BEING TESTED?

A state law requires that all public schools be tested for radon every five years. This will make it possible for schools to identify and remediate problems, thus protecting children from exposure to unusually high concentrations of radon in schools. The first cycle of testing must be completed by September 2005.

HOW WILL SCHOOLS BE TESTED?

The New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) requires that all frequently occupied rooms (such as classrooms and offices) that are in contact with the ground, or are directly above unoccupied areas of the basement, should be tested. Testing must be done by a professional certified by DEP, or by school officials who have received both training and a DEP identification number. Testing consists of placing a test device in each room, exposing it for several days, and then returning it to a laboratory to be measured.

IS RADON TESTING DANGEROUS IN ANY WAY?

No. The testing devices are not dangerous in any way. Most devices are filled with a measured amount of activated charcoal, the same type of charcoal used in water filters.

WHAT LEVEL OF RADON IS A PROBLEM AND HOW CAN IT BE FIXED?

The DEP and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) recommend that action be taken to reduce levels if the concentration of radon is 4 picocuries per liter (pCi/L) or higher. For school rooms with levels of 4 pCi/L or more, venting systems can be installed that vent radon gas from below the ground to the outside, where it is quickly diluted to very low levels. Sometimes heating-ventilation-air conditioning systems are adjusted to increase ventilation or air pressure so that radon levels are reduced.

WHAT CAN I DO?

Test your home! As mentioned before, more than 75 percent of a child's radon exposure comes from the home environment. Inexpensive do-it-yourself kits can be obtained from companies certified by the DEP, or you can hire a certified company to do the testing for you. A list of these companies, and other general information about radon, is available from the DEP Radon Section at (800) 648-0394 or visit: www.njradon.org.

If you have already tested your home and found low levels of radon, you may want to retest if changes have occurred that could affect radon levels. Examples of changes are new cracks opening up in the foundation, home remodeling that could change air flows in the house, or new construction nearby (such as installation of an in-ground swimming pool) that could affect the pattern of air flow in the soil. If you already have a mitigation system in your home, DEP recommends that you retest every two years to ensure the system is working properly.

For further information, contact:

**New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection
Radon Section
(800) 648-0394 or (609) 984-5425
www.njradon.org**

6/16/03